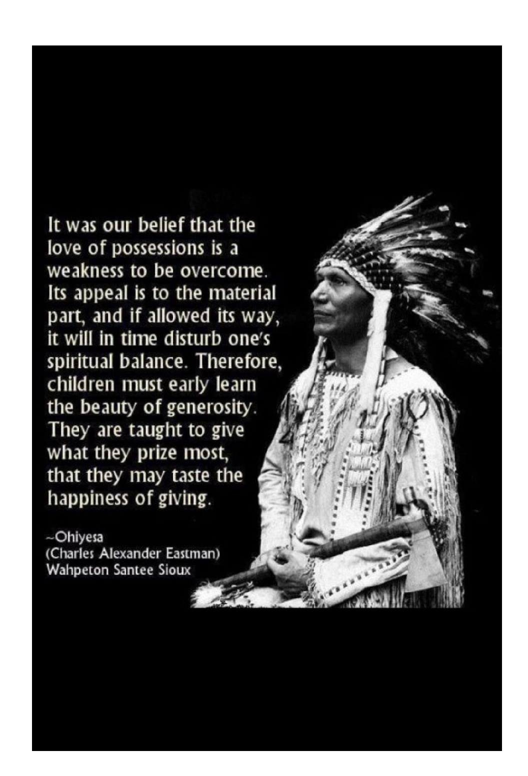
This history of Chief Gall is from the writings of ***Charles Alexander Eastman (Hakadah Ohíye S'a)*** *with additional notes and illustrations from various sources by the author Larry W Jones.*



Charles Alexander Eastman (born Hakadah and later named Ohíye S'a; February 19, 1858 – January 8, 1939) was a Santee Dakota physician educated at Boston University, writer, national lecturer, and reformer. In the early 20th century, he was "one of the most prolific authors and speakers on Sioux ethnohistory and American Indian affairs."

Eastman was of Santee Dakota, English and French ancestry. After working as a physician on reservations in South Dakota, he became increasingly active in issues on Native American rights. He is considered the first Native American author to write American history from the Native American point of view.

This is a biographical work.

First edition – January 2021

Book design by Larry W Jones

Published by lulu.com

ISBN – 978-1-716-26918-9

Chief Gall was one of the most aggressive leaders of the Sioux nation in their last stand for freedom.
The westward pressure of civilization during the past three centuries has been tremendous. When our hemisphere was "discovered", it had been inhabited by the natives for untold ages, but it was held undiscovered because the original owners did not chart or advertise it. Yet some of them at least had developed ideals of life which included real liberty and equality to all men, and they did not recognize individual ownership in land or other property beyond actual necessity. It was a soul development leading to essential manhood. Under this system they brought forth some striking characters.



Gall was considered by both Indians and whites to be a most impressive type of physical manhood. From his picture you can judge of this for yourself.

Let us follow his trail. He was no tenderfoot. He never asked a soft place for himself. He always played the game according to the rules and to a finish. To be sure, like every other man, he made some mistakes, but he was an Indian and never acted the coward.

The earliest stories told of his life and doings indicate the spirit of the man in that of the boy.
When he was only about three years old, the Blackfoot band of Sioux were on their usual roving hunt, following the buffalo while living their natural happy life upon the wonderful wide prairies of the Dakotas.



It was the way of every Sioux mother to adjust her household effects on such dogs and pack ponies as she could muster from day to day, often lending one or two to accommodate some other woman whose horse or dog had died, or perhaps had been among those stampeded and carried away by a raiding band of Crow warriors.

On this particular occasion, the mother of our young Sioux brave, Matohinshda, or Bear-Shedding-His-Hair (Gall's childhood name), intrusted her boy to an old Eskimo pack dog, experienced and reliable, except perhaps when unduly excited or very thirsty.



On the day of removing camp the caravan made its morning march up the Powder River. Upon the wide table-land the women were busily digging teepsinna (an edible sweetish root, much used by them) as the moving village slowly progressed.

*(**Note**) Description of teepsinna - Out on the prairie in July and August the women were wont to dig teepsinna with sharpened sticks, and many a bag full was dried and put away. This teepsinna is the root of a certain plant growing mostly upon high sandy soil. It is starchy but solid, with a sweetish taste, and is very fattening. The fully grown teepsinna is two or three inches long, and has a dark-brown bark not unlike the bark of a young tree. It can be eaten raw or stewed, and is always kept in a dried state, except when it is first dug.*

As usual at such times, the trail was wide. An old jack rabbit had waited too long in hiding. Now, finding himself almost surrounded by the mighty plains people, he sprang up suddenly, his feathery ears conspicuously erect, a dangerous challenge to the dogs and the people.



A whoop went up. Every dog accepted the challenge. Forgotten were the bundles, the kits, even the babies they were drawing or carrying. The chase was on, and the screams of the women reechoed from the opposite cliffs of the Powder, mingled with the yelps of dogs and the neighing of horses. The hand of every man was against the daring warrior, the lone Jack, and the confusion was great.

When the fleeing one cleared the mass of his enemies, he emerged with a swiftness that commanded respect and gave promise of a determined chase. Behind him, his pursuers stretched out in a thin line, first the speedy, unburdened dogs and then the travois dogs headed by the old Eskimo with his precious freight. The youthful Gall was in a travois, a basket mounted on trailing poles and harnessed to the sides of the animal.

*(Note) See photo on previous page. A **travois**, also known as a drag sled, was a traditional Native American tool for carrying loads overland. It consisted of two wooden poles with a platform, basket, or netting suspended between them, attached to the back of a **dog** (or occasionally to a team of **dogs**) so that the **dog** could pull it along the ground.*

"Hey! hey! they are gaining on him!" a warrior shouted. At this juncture two of the canines had almost nabbed their furry prey by the back. But he was too cunning for them. He dropped instantly and sent both dogs over his head, rolling and spinning, then made another flight at right angles to the first.

This gave the Eskimo a chance to cut the triangle. He gained fifty yards, but being heavily handicapped, two unladen dogs passed him. The same trick was repeated by the Jack, and this time he saved himself from instant death by a double loop and was now running directly toward the crowd, followed by a dozen or more dogs. He was losing speed, but likewise his pursuers were dropping off steadily.

Only the sturdy Eskimo dog held to his even gait, and behind him in the frail travois leaned forward the little Matohinshda, nude save a breech clout, his left hand holding fast the convenient tail of his dog, the right grasping firmly one of the poles of the travois. His black eyes were bulging almost out of their sockets; his long hair flowed out behind like a stream of dark water.

The Jack now ran directly toward the howling spectators, but his marvelous speed and alertness were on the wane; while on the other hand his foremost pursuer, who had taken part in hundreds of similar events, had every confidence in his own endurance. Each leap brought him nearer, fiercer and more determined. The last effort of the Jack was to lose himself in the crowd, like a fish in muddy water; but the big dog made the one needed leap with unerring aim and his teeth flashed as he caught the rabbit in viselike jaws and held him limp in air, a victor!

The people rushed up to him as he laid the victim down, and foremost among them was the frantic mother of Matohinshda, or Gall. “Michinkshe! michinkshe!” (My son! my son!) she screamed as she drew near. The boy seemed to be none the worse for his experience. “Mother!” he cried, “my dog is brave: he got the rabbit!” She snatched him off the travois, but he struggled out of her arms to look upon his dog lovingly and admiringly.



Old men and boys crowded about the hero of the day, the dog, and the thoughtful grandmother of Matohinshda unharnessed him and poured some water from a parfleche water bag into a basin. “Here, my grandson, give your friend something to drink.”

*(**Note**) A parfleche is a Native American rawhide container that is embellished by painting, incising, or both. Envelope-shaped parfleches have historically been used to contain items such household tools or foods, such as dried meat or pemmican. They were commonly made in pairs and hung from saddles. The name "parfleche" was initially used by French fur traders in the region, and derives from the French language parer meaning "to parry" or "to defend", and flèche meaning "arrow". "Parfleche" was also used to describe tough rawhide shields, but later used primarily for these decorated rawhide containers.*

“How, hechetu,” pronounced an old warrior no longer in active service. “This may be only an accident, an ordinary affair; but such things sometimes indicate a career. The boy has had a wonderful ride. I prophesy that he will one day hold the attention of all the people with his doings.”

This is the first remembered story of the famous chief, but other boyish exploits foretold the man he was destined to be.

He fought many sham battles, some successful and others not; but he was always a fierce fighter and a good loser.
Once he was engaged in a battle with snowballs. There were probably nearly a hundred boys on each side, and the rule was that every fair hit made the receiver officially dead. He must not participate further, but must remain just where he was struck.

Gall's side was fast losing, and the battle was growing hotter every minute when the youthful warrior worked toward an old water hole and took up his position there. His side was soon annihilated and there were eleven men left to fight him. He was pressed close in the wash-out, and as he dodged under cover before a volley of snowballs, there suddenly emerged in his stead a huge gray wolf.

His opponents fled in every direction in superstitious terror, for they thought he had been transformed into the animal. To their astonishment he came out on the farther side and ran to the line of safety, a winner!

It happened that the wolf's den had been partly covered with snow so that no one had noticed it until the yells of the boys aroused the inmate, and he beat a hasty retreat. The boys always looked upon this incident as an omen.

Gall had an amiable disposition but was quick to resent insult or injustice. This sometimes involved him in difficulties, but he seldom fought without good cause and was popular with his associates. One of his characteristics was his ability to organize, and this was a large factor in his leadership when he became a man. He was tried in many ways, and never was known to hesitate when it was a question of physical courage and endurance. He entered the public service early in life, but not until he had proved himself competent and passed all tests.

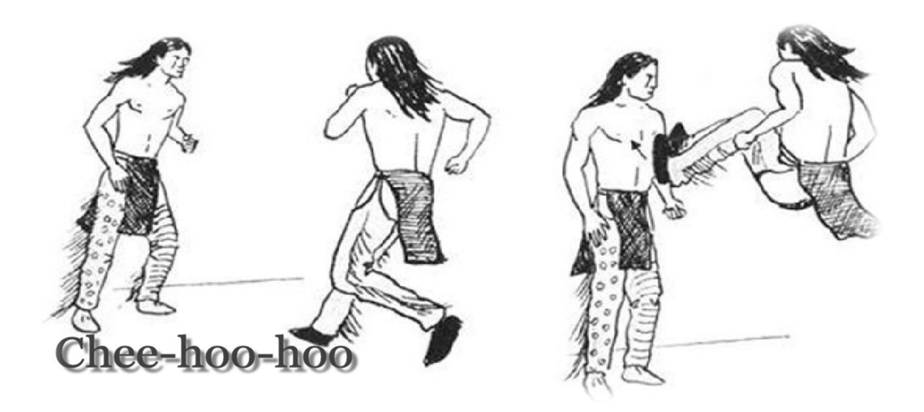


When a mere boy, he was once scouting for game in midwinter, far from camp, and was overtaken by a three days' blizzard. He was forced to abandon his horse and lie under the snow for that length of time. He afterward said he was not particularly hungry; it was thirst and stiffness from which he suffered most. One reason the Indian so loved his horse or dog was that at such times the animal would stay by him like a brother. On this occasion Gall's pony was not more than a stone's throw away when the storm subsided and the sun shone. There was a herd of buffalo in plain sight, and the young hunter was not long in procuring a meal.

This chief's contemporaries still recall his wrestling match with the equally powerful Cheyenne boy, Roman Nose, who afterward became a chief well known to American history. It was a custom of the northwestern Indians, when two friendly tribes camped together, to establish the physical and athletic supremacy of the youth of the respective camps.



The “Che-hoo-hoo” is a wrestling game in which there may be any number on a side, but the numbers are equal. All the boys of each camp are called together by a leader chosen for the purpose and draw themselves up in line of battle; then each at a given signal attacks his opponent.



In this memorable contest, Matohinshda, or Gall, was placed opposite Roman Nose. The whole people turned out as spectators of the struggle, and the battlefield was a plateau between the two camps, in the midst of picturesque Bad Lands. There were many athletic youths present, but these two were really the Apollos of the two tribes.

In this kind of sport it is not allowed to strike with the hand, nor catch around the neck, nor kick, nor pull by the hair. One may break away and run a few yards to get a fresh start, or clinch, or catch as catch can.

When a boy is thrown and held to the ground, he is counted out. If a boy has met his superior, he may drop to the ground to escape rough handling, but it is very seldom one gives up without a full trial of strength.

It seemed almost like a real battle, so great was the enthusiasm, as the shouts of sympathizers on both sides went up in a mighty chorus. At last all were either conquerors or subdued except Gall and Roman Nose. The pair seemed equally matched. Both were stripped to the breech clout, now tugging like two young buffalo or elk in mating time, again writhing and twisting like serpents.

At times they fought like two wild stallions, straining every muscle of arms, legs, and back in the struggle. Every now and then one was lifted off his feet for a moment, but came down planted like a tree, and after swaying to and fro soon became rigid again.



All eyes were upon the champions. Finally, either by trick or main force, Gall laid the other sprawling upon the ground and held him fast for a minute, then released him and stood erect, panting, a master youth. Shout after shout went up on the Sioux side of the camp. The mother of Roman Nose came forward and threw a superbly worked buffalo robe over Gall, whose mother returned the compliment by covering the young Cheyenne with a handsome blanket.



Undoubtedly these early contests had their influence upon our hero's career. It was his habit to appear most opportunely in a crisis, and in a striking and dramatic manner to take command of the situation. The best known example of this is his entrance on the scene of confusion when Reno surprised the Sioux on the Little Big Horn.


Major Marcus Reno

*(**Note**) Marcus Albert Reno (November 15, 1834 – March 30, 1889) was a United States career military officer who served in the American Civil War where he was a combatant in a number of major battles, and later under George Armstrong Custer in the Great Sioux War against the Lakota (Sioux) and Northern Cheyenne.*

Reno is most noted for his prominent role in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, where he failed to support Custer's position on the battlefield, remaining instead in a defensive formation with his troops about four miles away.

This event has since been a longstanding subject of controversy regarding his command decisions in the course of one of the most infamous defeats in the history of the United States military.

Many of the excitable youths, almost unarmed, rushed madly and blindly to meet the intruder, and the scene might have unnerved even an experienced warrior. It was Gall, with not a garment upon his superb body, who on his black charger dashed ahead of the boys and faced them. He stopped them on the dry creek, while the bullets of Reno's men whistled about their ears.

"Hold hard, men! Steady, we are not ready yet! Wait for more guns, more horses, and the day is yours!"
They obeyed, and in a few minutes the signal to charge was given, and Reno retreated pell mell before the onset of the Sioux.

Sitting Bull had confidence in his men so long as Gall planned and directed the attack, whether against United States soldiers or the warriors of another tribe. He was a strategist, and able in a twinkling to note and seize upon an advantage. He was really the mainstay of Sitting Bull's effective last stand. He consistently upheld his people's right to their buffalo plains and believed that they should hold the government strictly to its agreements with them.


Sitting Bull

When the treaty of 1868 was disregarded, he agreed with Sitting Bull in defending the last of their once vast domain, and after the Custer battle entered Canada with his chief. They hoped to bring their lost cause before the English government and were much disappointed when they were asked to return to the United States.

*(**Note**) On June 25, 1876, Sitting Bull's warriors had joined with other Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana, which resulted in the massacre of George Custer and more than 200 troops of the 7th Cavalry. Worried that their great victory would provoke a massive retaliation by the U.S. military, the Indians scattered into smaller bands. During the following year, the U.S. Army tracked down and attacked several of these groups, forcing them to surrender and move to reservations.*

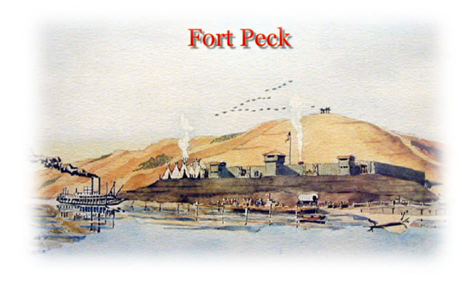
Sitting Bull and his followers, however, managed to avoid a decisive confrontation with the U.S. Army. They spent the summer and winter after Little Bighorn hunting buffalo in Montana and fighting small skirmishes with soldiers. In the fall of 1876, Colonel Nelson A. Miles met with Sitting Bull at a neutral location and tried to talk him into surrendering and relocating to a reservation. Although anxious for peace, Sitting Bull refused. As the victor of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull felt he should be dictating terms to Miles, not the other way around.

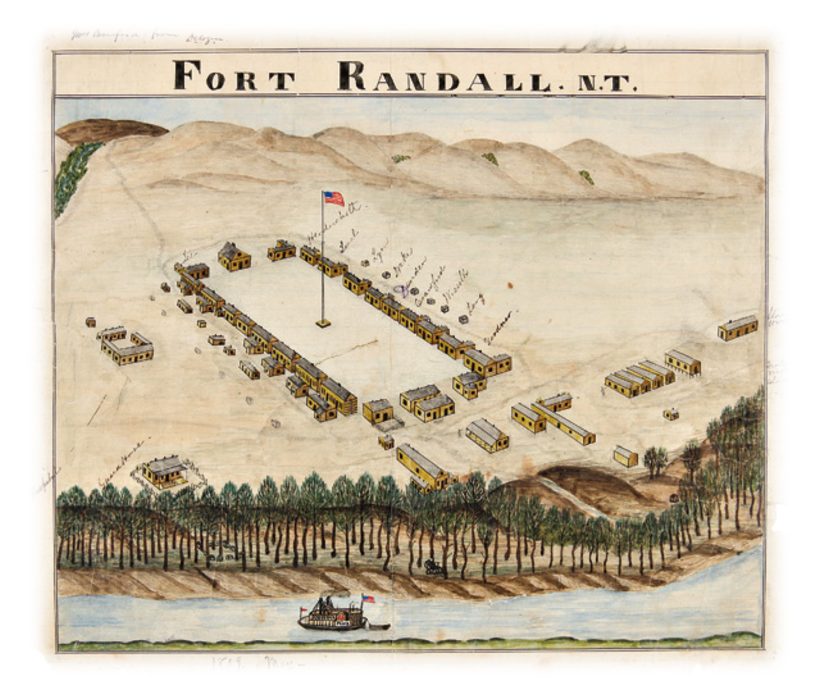
Angered by what he saw as Sitting Bull's foolish obstinacy, Miles stepped up his campaign of harassment against the chief and his people. Sitting Bull's band continued to roam about Montana in search of increasingly scarce buffalo, but the constant travel, lack of food, and military pressure began to take a toll.

In 1877, Sitting Bull abandoned his traditional homeland in Montana and led his people north across the border into Canada. Sitting Bull and his band stayed in the Grandmother's Country—so called in honor of the British Queen Victoria—for the next four years. The first year was idyllic. The band found plenty of buffalo and Sitting Bull could rest and play with his children in peace.

The younger warriors, though, soon tired of the quiet life. The braves made trouble with neighboring tribes, attracting the displeasure of the Canadian Mounties. While the Canadian leaders were more reasonable and sensitive about Indian affairs than their aggressive counterparts to the south, they became increasingly nervous and pressured Sitting Bull to return to the U.S.

Gall finally reported at Fort Peck, Montana, in 1881, and brought half of the Hunkpapa band with him, whereupon he was soon followed by Sitting Bull himself. Although they had been promised by the United States commission who went to Canada to treat with them that they would not be punished if they returned, no sooner had Gall come down than a part of his people were attacked, and in the spring they were all brought to Fort Randall and held as military prisoners.





*(**Note**) Fort Randall - The site for the fort was selected in 1856 by General William S. Harney. The fort served as a strategic site on the river to defend two lines of transportation; it operated for 36 years. It was named for Colonel Daniel Randall, a career Army officer who also served as Deputy Paymaster General of the Army.*

It was the last link in a chain of forts protecting the overland route along the Platte River. It was also the first fort in a chain of forts on the upper Missouri River. The most important mission assigned to the soldiers of Fort Randall was to mount expeditions to try to control the many Indian tribes on the Great Plains, primarily the Teton Sioux (Lakota people).

After serving as an important base in the Indian Wars, Fort Randall closed in 1892.

From this point they were returned to Standing Rock agency.



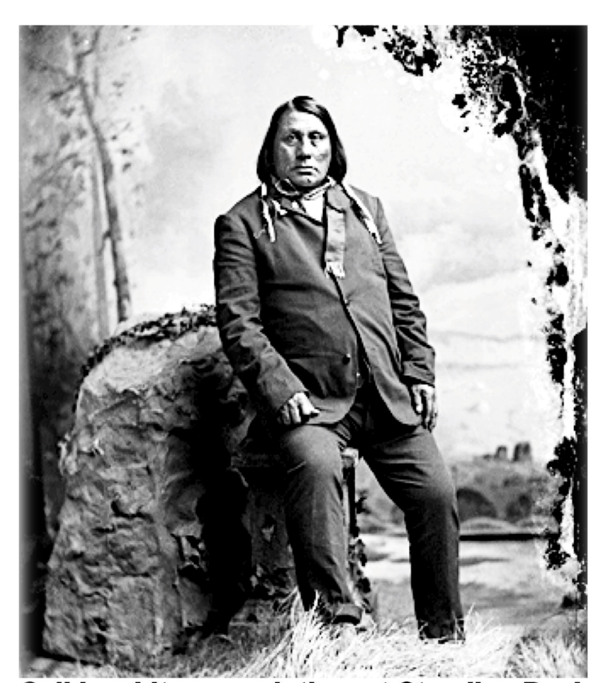
When "Buffalo Bill" successfully launched his first show, he made every effort to secure both Sitting Bull and Gall for his leading attractions. The military was in complete accord with him in this, for they still had grave suspicions of these two leaders. While Sitting Bull reluctantly agreed, Gall haughtily said: "I am not an animal to be exhibited before the crowd," and retired to his teepee. His spirit was much worn, and he lost strength from that time on. That superb manhood dwindled, and in a few years he died. He was a real hero of a free and natural people, a type that is never to be seen again.



SITTING BULL AND BUFFALO BILL.
Copyrighted 1897.


CHIEF GALL.





Gall in white-man clothes at Standing Rock. Later in life, Gall felt assimilation into white society was the only way for his people to survive. Late 1880s. Photo: D.F. Barry

*(**Note**) "Man Who Goes in the Middle," or Pizi, a Hunkpapa Sioux chief, was one of the major Indian field commanders at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.*

He was born around 1840 on the Moreau River in South Dakota. The boy was raised as an orphan, and little is known of his parents. He earned his name when, as a hungry youngster, he tried to eat the gall bladder of an animal. Later in his youth, he was given the name Matohinsa, "Bear Shedding His Hair," but the name Pizi was the one by which he was best known.

As a young man, Gall took part in many battles fought by the Dakota bands under Red Cloud. When the Treaty of 1868 was signed, Gall was one of the many who refused to comply with the provision of all Dakota Indians returning to reservations.

Sitting Bull adopted Gall as a younger brother, and he later became a Dakota war chief. Gall was accused of a murder he did not commit, and the Army put a price on his head. Gall went into Fort Berthold to protest. He was seized, bayoneted and left for dead. Remarkably, he was able to crawl away and survived. Later, he took his revenge by preying upon the Bozeman Expedition and was involved in several disastrous raids.

In 1876, Sitting Bull, Gall and their warriors were grouped in a huge encampment on the Little Bighorn River it was perhaps the largest single gathering of Indian forces yet seen in the Northern Plains area. On June 25, troops under General Custer and Major Reno attacked. Gall sprang into action and turned the flank of Reno's men, forcing them to retreat. He and Crazy Horse then surrounded Custer's cavalry and wiped them out.

Gall first pursued Reno's detachment, but he returned to the main camp when it became apparent the main body of the United States force was en route to the scene. The

encampment broke up, and the various bands began a retreat to the north. After several skirmishes with the Army, Gall, Sitting Bull, and their followers escaped into Canada.

Winters there were harsh, and many became discouraged. After four years, Gall, Crow Chief and others denounced Sitting Bull and returned to the United States where they settled at Standing Rock Reservation.

In 1881, Gall reconciled himself to white authority and became a farmer. Eventually he befriended James McLaughlin, an Indian Agent. McLaughlin convinced Gall the Dakota should send their children to school.

When Sitting Bull returned from Canada in 1881, Gall opposed the policies of his one-time mentor, accusing him of cowardice. Gall had come to realize the futility of any further armed resistance. It was a time of relative peace, and Gall grew to be highly regarded by whites for his wisdom and honesty. He was appointed as a judge of the Court of Indian Affairs in 1889, and in the same year, he was instrumental in gaining the ratification of the last agreement with the Dakota Indians. This ratification broke up the Sioux reservation into several smaller parcels, and some of the lands were ceded to the whites.

During his last years, Gall was an envoy to Washington, D.C. on behalf of his tribe. He enjoyed a place of considerable prestige until his death at Oak Creek, South Dakota on December 5, 1895, at the age of 54.

Source:
Dockstader, Frederick J. Great North American Indians: Profiles in Life and Leadership. New York, NY: Litton Educational Publishing, Inc., 1977.

About the Author

Larry W Jones is a songwriter, having penned over 7,700 song lyrics. Published in 22 volumes of island themed, country, cowboy, western and bluegrass songs. The entire assemblage is the world's largest collection of lyrics written by an individual songwriter.

As a wrangler on the "Great American Horse Drive", at age 68, he assisted in driving 800 half-wild horses 62 miles in two days, from Winter pasture grounds in far NW Colorado to the Big Gulch Ranch outside of Craig Colorado.

His book, "The Oldest Greenhorn", chronicles the adventures and perils in earning the "Gate-to-Gate" trophy belt buckle the hard way.

Other short story books include:
A Squirrel Named Julie and The Fox Ridge Fox
The Painting Of A Dream
The Boy With Green Thumbs and The Wild Tree Man
Red Cloud – Chief Of the Sioux
Spotted Tail – The Orphan Negotiator
All his publications are available on Lulu.com.

